"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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THE CHALLENGE OF THE BECKONING SEVENTIES*

by Henry S. Randolph

This is an attempt to look into the future on the wings of the present trends. When I attempt to do this I always hear the voice of one of George Eliot's characters saying, "Prophecy is one of the most gratuitous forms of error." Anyway, the prophet Joel reminds us that it is the young who prophesy and see visions; the old men only dream dreams. I retire on age at the end of this year, so this may be my last chance to share my dreams with you.

We cannot assuredly know what the course of events will do to or require of the church in the town and country cause to which some of us are committed. Even the great rural church prophet that Dr. Warren H. Wilson was in laying down principles which are considered valid in the program today, made at least one mistake as he looked into the future and declared in 1911 that this new fangled thing the automobile,will never seriously affect rural people. He lived to see his error, having died in 1937.

I like Robert Louis Stevenson's words that "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." "To travel hopefully"...The object of our quest in town and country church is not a citadel or a sanctuary, but a highway, the way of the Lord through a wilderness of rapid change and doubt and fear and evil. Earthbound and dated, tied to the course of contemporary events as our task is, yet there is quality and power in it that is timeless. I feel a sense of kinship with those other words of Stevenson who spoke of a road built through the jungle of Samoa: "Our road is not built to last a thousand years, yet in a sense it is. When a road is once built, it is a strange thing how it collects traffic, how every year, as it goes on, more and more people are found to walk thereon, and others are raised up to repair and perpetuate it, and keep it alive." The town and country church,

*An address before the Omaha School for Presbyterian Rural Pastors-Summer, 1960. Used by kind permission.

as a phase of the total church is like that. It has continuity only as successive generations keep working on it. All manner of people use it. Being what it is, it is always arriving somewhere with some people yet has no final destination. In recent years numerous town and countr churches using the Achievement Goals have been recognized by their synods as town and country churches of distinction. This indicated that they had made measurable progress. But this recognition only refueled them for greater power to travel farther on the highway of Christian ministry, striving to attain new goals.

I am now making certain broad assumptions as a frame for what I want to say today.

1. The population of the world and the United States will continue to increase for the next fifteen years at the rate of 1.7% per year, reaching a total of 225 million by 1975.

2. Farm population will continue to decline, but not as rapidly as in the past five years. But within the next fifteen years it may be reduced from the present 20 million to 17.5 million.

3. The non-farm rural population which has increased 48% between 1950 and 1958, is expected to continue at a very high, but unpredicatable, rate on through 1975.
The non-farm rural population is increasing at a much higher rate than the farm population is decreasing, consequently the total rural population is not declining but increasing in numbers, and is expected to continue to increase on through 1975.

4. The mobility of people will continue in most rural areas; the non-farm rural people moving more frequently than farm people.

5. All special, racial and cultural groups will have increasingly wide distribution throughout the United States, with an increasing number in rural areas.

6. The decentralization trend will continue, expressed in a thrust out from the urban centers with an ever widening circumference, smaller industries, office buildings, shopping centers, and institutions of all sorts.

7. The blending of urban and rural cultures will continue at a pace. There will be an increasing amount of intercourse between rural and urban folk. Rural people will become more like urban people at certain points, and urban people will become more like rural people, but not identical.

8. The consolidation trend in rural areas will continue, merging institutions, organizations, and service agencies for greater efficiency. Local units will surrender to larger units.

9. The trend toward the development of larger communities will continue, extending all sorts of services to a wider geographical area so as to incorporate more people for larger units of support.

These nine trends which I have assumed to continue with considerable force for at least the next fifteen years are probably the most obvious and easily describable aspects of our dynamic rural society. Such developments of course, do much more than increase the statistical dimensions of our task in an important degree. More significantly, these trends, on their very surface raise important questions as to their implications for the church. These social and economic changes certainly will make new demands upon rural people and their church. We shall now look at some of these new changes affecting the church--in more detail.

1. The continued increase in population in the United States and in the world will require farmers to produce more food and fiber. This additional food and fiber will be produced with fewer farmers and on the present agricultural land. Our improved agricultural technology will readily take care of that matter. Farms will become larger, and more agricultural technology will be employed. Many marginal farm lands will be discontinued.

2. In some agricultural areas, where more people will be leaving than returning, the church will either decline in membership and activities and leadership, or else it will pursue a course of reorganization,-larger parishes. This type of reorganization has already established a well defined trend in the church.

3. More people and new people will come to rural areas with different concepts of what the church should be and should do. To meet this situation the church will need to re-evaluate its purpose, its program, its equipment and its leadership.

4. The church is usually ill prepared to meet population mobility. Protestantism has been geared to an assumed permanence.

The blending of the rural and urban cultures produced a new hybrid culture which in many respects is as new and different as hybrid corn is different from its parent stocks. It is not

rural as we once knew rural, neither is it urban according to the traditions. It is a social culture seeking a bigger, better and more satisfying climate. The old farmhouse, the old one room school, and the ancient inefficient church beside the cemetery no longer fit into this new picture of the seventies.

Our People

The church in town and country is challenged to face the impact of this new social culture, to reconstruct its thinking as a living church of Christ should, so as to meet the needs of changing times. Attitudes toward people may need to change, for here are new people coming into the community; some of them from the city; some from the south; some from the north; some recently from Europe, Asia and Africa. They are all colors and races. They seek a new home, new friends, a new church. This situation, so common throughout America, places new responsibility upon the church. No one, for whatever reason, can be left outside this fellowship.

A smaller percentage of rural people are related to churches than any other segment of the nation's population. Vast areas of unchurched or poorly churched people exist throughout rural America. The presence of many church buildings and organizations in a community does not necessarily mean that the people are adequately served. Many country churches stand as empty shells with no program of service to meet human needs, and the people are without a vital gospel. This prevalent condition is a challenge to the Presbyterian Church, with its vital, forward-looking program for town and country people, and its concern is not only with worship and evangelism but with good schools, good houses, sanitary surroundings, adequate opportunities for play, wholesome neighborhood relations, opportunity for personal growth and development.

Organization

The town and country church of today must face the challenge which normally arises from town and country development forces. The new consolidated school has come. The new county health clinic and hospital has been realized. The new roads and streets have been built; new industries have been established; new and bigger cooperatives and markets organized; new transportation facilities are available for people to commute many miles to a city for work, shopping or play. Everyone has electricity and telephones. The new rural development program has moved forward on many new fronts, challenging the community to think and act in bigger terms.

The church can no longer survive on its history and traditions, however rich. The church must march and in step with moving, changing times. It must think in terms of larger units of organization and administration. A parish of less than 250 active members will presently have difficulty meeting the demands of the new day, unless it is highly subsidized by a mission board. This fact calls for

serious rethinking of the church's reorganizational strategy. What will the future be - more and bigger larger parishes or will it be the merging and consolidation of united churches or will it be a revolutionary move to consolidate all Protestant churches of a larger area?

Buildings and Facilities

Town and country church buildings and facilities for the conduct of a modern program are for the most part inadequate. The worship facilities in instances is second rate. The educational and fellowship space and equipment are impoverished. This cannot continue if the church is to have any respectable status in the community. The church must be the best building in the community in architecture, beauty and usefulness. It must be centrally located and adequate in size to serve the large community area.

The church must have a beautiful, modern manse in the heart of the community so that the minister may live in the midst as servant.

The Center

In the beckoning seventies the church must be the unifying center of life, strengthening the neighborhood as a social unit, building life into a cooperative Christian fellowship. The Church must bend its energies toward developing a program in every under-churched town and country community to the nation, helping that community to create for itself an adequate and beautiful church plant and a creative program.

New Leaders

Out of the poverty of rural church equipment, program, and leadership of the past has come a never ending stream of professional and lay leadership to supply the personnel demands of the Church in both home and foreign lands. The present personnel is far from adequate to meet the needs. In every area of the Church's service, more dedicated, well trained workers are needed. Is it not reasonable to expect that if our town and country churches are strengthened with the kind of equipment, program, and personnel needed, greater leadership will result for the church at large? These challenges call for a far greater investment of the Church's resources in rural America than ever before.

The Rural World

Rural people around the world are in the process of rapid change. Changes taking place in Africa, Asia and Latin America are not unlike the changes which have taken place in rural America. In these lands the change has been quicker and more abrupt, and more revolutionary whereas change in rural America has taken place over a longer period of time and at a much slower pace. The people undergoing this

revolutionary change need help to enable them to come out of the dilemmas which this change has imposed upon them. The town and country church has a philosophy, organization, program and methodology which it has accumulated over more than fifty years of evolution which should be shared with, not imposed upon, the so called younger churches. These people covet our fellowship and our prayers. It is thus that the town and country church of America is challenged to have a world wide interest in town and country people and their problems of life.

Our concern for rual people of other lands expanded greatly in the "Golden Fifties." We have had intimate fellowship with them. We have conferred together. We know something of our common problems. We know that there are some things we can and should do together as a world Christian brotherhood and community of town and country people. Ties have been flavored by these experiences. The church must help to conserve this concern for the peoples of the world and from it to develop the historic Christian concept - a truly universal brotherhood of man. More than ever before, well-thinking men and women are inclined to think and work with the church that has a real program for the community to the end that all people of the earth, without distincition of any sort, may pursue their material well being and their spiritual development under conditions of freedom and dignity.

Tomorrow's Church of the Countryside

Many wonderful things have happened to the town and country church in the past half of a century. But the mission of the town and country church of today calls for a new strategy. Looking at our new and changing rural life in America from the perspective of the Gospel, new directions for the church are indicated. So radical and dynamic are the changes that the stable and normal church of other days no longer exists. The church must adjust its philosophy and method to a new set of conditions. The church of tomorrow will be involved in the angry spots in our society, with the wants and needs of people of all cultures and races and classes of people. The middle class church or the rich white church or the poor Negro church can no longer be countenanced. The church cannot be an exclusive club for contented, saved souls. It must be a dynamic, vital force in modern human society in behalf of the purposes of God. Perhaps I can express it no better than did Dr. Charles J. Galpin in 1925 when he wrote:

"Religion is the only light I know in this twilight world. It may sometimes be a smoky lantern. It may be hidden under the jacket of some ordinary person. I shall not live to see the new day for the rural church; but that day will come..... I believe a prophet will arise who, warming all hearts and bringing to the point of ignition the dormant love of man for man -- for just plain men, will build upon the facts of this generation and upon the insights of this

intellectual era, and the rural church will rise to distinction. I do not expect to see with my own eyes your denominations and mine--all very haughty cults, indeed -- joining their resources in a single battle cry against the devil; but I do not doubt for a single instant that it will one day come."

Yes, tomorrow's church of the countryside will be a cooperating church. This is one of the greatest challenges facing the leadership of the church today. Such cooperation has been achieved in some rural communities and is in rapid process in others. The Church will not know its great power in the rural community until it has united all its denominational forces into one common, organized impact upon the life of that community and the world beyond. The town and country community offers an unparalleled opportunity of service in this area of inter-church relationship.

Tomorrow's church of the countryside must be a growing church, a church of new life. It "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." It must grow--grow in perception of its human task in the community and grow in willingness to face its task in the spirit of the living Christ.

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THE CHRISTIAN RURAL FELLOWSHIP

The Christian Rural Fellowship is a world wide organization concerned with the highest ideals for agriculture and rural life and strong rural churches. Its membership includes ministers, teachers, agriculturists and other rural leaders. The Fellowship publishes literature of high quality, arranges opportunities for leaders to meet for inspiration and to exchange experience, and conducts institutes and conferences in the interest of leadership training.

Through its branches as listed below the Fellowship stimulates creative thinking and action on basic rural issues like stewardship of the land, conservation, rural health and community development.

Members receive the Christian Rural Fellowship bulletin quarterly. Each issue is of a classic nature dealing rather completely with some current rural subject. Members also receive the journal, Rural Missions, which gives concrete accounts of what is being done by rural churchmen, agricultural and missions both in the United States and abroad for the improvement of rural life. In addition to these two periodicals, other important literature is supplied free to members from time to time.

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